

## Query Responses IYMC 2018

### 1. MEETING FOR WORSHIP

#### QUERIES

Are our meetings for worship held in a spirit of expectant waiting and communion with the Holy Spirit?

How do we prepare our hearts and minds for worship?

How do we refer to that which is divine? How does ascribing gender to the Holy Spirit affect our worship?

How do we integrate our daily lives with meeting for worship? Do we seek opportunities for worship outside of meeting?

How does the vocal ministry of the meeting contribute to its spiritual life? In what ways do we recognize and nurture vocal ministry and other spiritual gifts?

#### Selected Responses

We talked about what the word *worship* means to us, and what we do during worship time. Some spend the time in reflection or introspection, some in meditation. Bowing down to or praising a King or Lord doesn't seem to describe what we do in worship, but bowing *ourselves* (our thoughts, will, self-centeredness) down in deference to the Spirit does. We don't have special individual practices for First Day mornings, but some do have practices throughout the week that support worship. Bible reading and conscious orientation to God and Christ were mentioned.

In theory we know that Spirit and God must exist way beyond gender, but we have to admit that gender is a powerful force in our thoughts and emotions. We notice that when we meet a person whose gender is ambiguous it gives us pause, because we're so used to categorizing people immediately. So thinking of God with a male or female pronoun attached may indeed affect our worship. One person suggested "if this throws us off our stride, let us recall that we are not coming to worship to have a stride of our own, but to learn to walk as God teaches us."

...

We find the advice with this query full of good wisdom, good stuff. We considered the question of how to recognize that we have a message that is meant to be shared in worship. We recognize the gradual movement within Quakerism from a traditional Christian basis to the present time when we refer to that which is Ultimate in a variety of ways and may experience that reality differently. ... Pronouns referring to that which is Ultimate make a difference to many of us; ascribing gender to God may feel very limiting and the transgender community can bring new challenges to this issue. Silence following a vocal message is important to us and we find it hard to communicate this to others who come for special events, such as memorials or weddings. Some of us experience a sense of a message developing over time, moving into maturity over perhaps days or weeks until it is ready to be shared. Possibly an opposite of that is a message that comes in fragments over a few minutes during a single meeting for worship. Finally, we know we need to learn to love those with whom we differ and to experience that love in our worship.

## **2. OUTREACH**

### **QUERIES**

Do we encourage inter-visitation within yearly meeting and with other Friends?

What are we doing to share our faith with others outside our Friends' community?

How do we speak truth as we know it and yet remain open to truth as understood by others?

In what ways do we cooperate with persons and groups with whom we share concerns?

How do we reach out to those with whom we disagree?

How do we make the presence of our meeting known to the larger community?

Do we invite others to share in our meetings for worship and other meeting activities?

Do we welcome everyone and appreciate the gifts that differences such as race, creed, economic status, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation may bring to us?

### **Selected Response**

It seems that whenever we do outreach, "inreach" occurs as well. Unless we have opportunities to share about issues and questions that are important to us, we can miss the chance to examine and clarify our values.

It's notable that the query states the importance of expressing our faith in both words and deeds. We tend to focus on deeds, thinking it's enough to 'let our lives speak', or to 'see what love will do'. This query suggests that expressing our faith in words matters too. Someone who attends a weekly peace vigil wonders if that quiet witness is enough. It may be important to continue to work on expressing in words what our faith is about, and what we stand for.

### **3. MEETING FOR BUSINESS**

#### **QUERIES**

How can we hold our meetings for business in the spirit of love, understanding and patient search for unity without becoming frustrated by differences of opinion or the pressures of time?

How do we respond when no one else in the meeting seems to hold the views that we do on an issue?

How do we respond to a dissenting minority?

How do we share responsibilities among Friends in our meeting?

How do we serve our meetings?

#### **Selected responses**

Appreciation was expressed for the clerking as steady, faithful, helpful, peaceful, open and prepared. We recognize that process matters; what it feels like to conduct our business is important. Some feel frustration when something contentious comes to us and two individuals try to resolve it between themselves rather than letting the whole group hold the concern.

Some wonder what to do when they feel that no one will agree with them. While the importance of stating one's opinion or feelings was strongly affirmed and encouraged, there remains a reluctance to state something that may not be in agreement with what is generally being expressed. It was noted that it is important to hold Friends in the Light when they speak, implying a worshipful atmosphere. We do not want to keep people from expressing their opinions and wonder how we can support people in speaking up. While we recognize that dissent is healthy in principle, we may not fully allow for it by our attitudes and our haste to express ourselves. We may need to hear that different voice as it can bring a new perspective to the issue.

...

We understand that the Quaker decision making process can be time consuming. It has been expressed that some members find this frustrating especially during Quarterly and Yearly Meeting business sessions. Generally, within our small group this has not been an issue as our members have a feeling of comfort with the group. We are free to discuss and ask the necessary questions so that we more fully understand the issues before the Meeting and can make informed decisions more easily. We feel that we have arrived at decisions expediently when possible and have had the patience to wait for a sense of the meeting concerning other issues when more time is required.

#### **4. HARMONY WITHIN THE MEETING**

##### **QUERIES**

What can we do to deepen our relationships with one another?

How does gender affect the way we relate to each other?

How does our meeting balance the needs for honesty and kindness? What topics do we avoid for the sake of “unity”?

When in conflict with others, do we cultivate a forgiving spirit?

Do we look to that of God in ourselves and seek to address that of God in those with whom we disagree?

##### **Selected responses**

We would like to have the opportunity to have discussions about controversial issues just for the experience of hearing one another and threshing out our own positions. It is valuable to do this before there is a deadline to make a decision. We need to feel free to speak an unpopular opinion. One member recalls, in the past, not feeling free to express an opinion that another disagreed with – having been given the message (not overtly) “we don’t think that in this meeting.” A friend offered to check into whether we could use a second hour to practice this type of discourse. One question we could work on is: “Do we really believe that there is that of God in each person?”

...

We agree that a topic we tend to avoid for the sake of unity is the Divine and our own experience of that. Such experience may well feel tender and so we are reluctant to speak of it for fear that it might be criticized by others. We realize that while speaking of God and/or Jesus is uncomfortable for some of us, we do want all who come to feel comfortable here and we want to be able to express our spirituality honestly. While we are comfortable as Quakers, feeling this is a good place for us, we tend not to feel that Quakerism is superior to other religions.

...

Conflict is difficult, but if everyone is not in agreement, honesty and kindness can help to maintain harmony. It is important to listen and to voice disagreement respectfully. In our meeting contentious issues do not arise often, but when they do, we have shown that we can respect the views of others through open discussion and dialogue on the topic at hand. It takes courage to speak out when we do not agree with others. Leaving disagreement unexpressed, or avoiding sharing one’s thoughts and feelings, are not ways to find a solution or options on difficult issues. We in the meeting must always encourage others to share their views, even if they seem to not agree with the majority. Often it is through disagreement that the best solution is found, and this can create and maintain harmony in the meeting.

## **5. MUTUAL CARE**

### **QUERIES**

How do we respond to each other's personal needs and difficulties in sensitive and useful ways?

Do we encourage both men and women to share in caregiving?

What are we doing to welcome and draw members and attenders of all ages into the fellowship of the meeting?

How do we help our children feel the loving care of the meeting?

What do the children contribute to the meeting?

How do we keep in touch with inactive and distant members and attenders?

### **Selected responses**

Ministry and counsel is available to assist people who have issues that they don't want everybody to be aware of. We share more of ourselves in circle after meeting through sharing joys and sorrows, and often time we follow up later in the week.

For people who are new to Quaker practice, it can be confusing where to find assistance, so members of ministry and counsel are now making an effort to introduce themselves as such during our social time after meeting, so newcomers know where to take concerns in need of pastoral concern. We also note with gratitude the efforts one particular member makes to send notes to members who are away, particularly college students. Several in our query circle celebrated our experience of meeting as our chosen family

...

There are some who live in town but no longer participate in Meeting as their needs were not being met by the Meeting; they may prefer little or no contact. Those situations need to be respected; we hope to remain open to the possible return of such people.

## 6. EDUCATION

### QUERIES

How can we most effectively foster a spirit of inquiry and a loving and understanding attitude toward life?

What effort are we making to become better acquainted with the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, our Judeo-Christian heritage, the history and principles of Friends, and the contributions of other religions and philosophies to our spiritual heritage?

In what ways can we encourage an educational process that is consistent with the values Friends cherish?

How do gender based expectations affect the goals we set and the way we learn?

Do we take an active and supportive interest in schools, libraries and other educational resources in our communities and elsewhere?

How do we prepare ourselves and our children to play active roles in a changing world?

### Selected Response

We are strongly united on the importance of public education. Public funding of private schools undermines public schools. The practice of taking one's children out of a failing school undermines the school and the system. Public education must be well funded to be able to address the great variety of needs among its students. Good public schools are basic to democracy as are public libraries and emergency response teams. They all are part of community. Poorer areas tend to have poorer schools as the parents are not able to give as much support as are parents in more wealthy areas; we need to equalize. We see charter schools as part of white flight and privatization. We need to come together as a community and agree on what we are going to teach our children. We note that bullying seems to be a big issue in schools today, and what that does in addition to harming people, small and large, is that it teaches children to bully.

In response to the last sentence of the Query, "How do we prepare ourselves and our children to play active roles in a changing world?," we feel that we need to stay close to the Source. We trust that God is good and that staying close will guide us and prepare us to take appropriate action. We feel that well considered and guided action is essential in today's world. We need to approach this action with eyes that are looking for the good in everyone we meet. This is a testament of our faith rather than a test of our faith. We realize that we must be working with all the people in our community, not just the ones who look or act like us; this includes both those who have been part of our communities for generations and those who are new to us. Letters, phone calls and visits with our elected representatives from a centered, guided spirit are a good starting place. We are concerned for all those who feel and are threatened by recent governmental actions, realizing that trust will be hard to rebuild.

## **7. HOME AND FAMILY**

### **QUERIES**

How can we make our homes places of love and hospitality?

What different expectations do we hold for women and men, boys and girls?

How can we bring more equality into our relationships?

How do we develop and maintain lines of communication?

In what ways do we share our deepest experiences, struggles, concerns and beliefs with our children and others, yet encourage them to develop their potential as the Spirit leads them?

What place do we make in our daily lives for meditation, spiritual renewal and reading of inspiring literature, such as the Bible?

How does our meeting support families of all kinds?

### **Selected Response**

Our families abound, whether by birth and blood, or through our beloved spiritual communities. We celebrate our connections, but are often challenged by the changes in technology and time management, understanding broader definitions of gender and equality, and the search for creative paths to acknowledge and express feeling and emotions such as anger and frustration.

One Friend said “Love and concern for the well-being of all of God’s creation is in fact sometimes expressed through anger and through working to right “the things we cannot accept”.

Intimacy is fostered when there is space to feel and express authentically “all” of our feelings while also being guided to what are appropriate ways to behave when expressing ourselves. Whether our birth family or our chosen family of faith, our family creates and enhances bonds of love not when we are pressured to conform to the ways things have “always” been, but rather when we give and receive affirmations of and witness to one another’s growing into our God-given wholeness.

## **8. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **QUERIES**

How do we center our lives in the awareness of God the Spirit, so that all things may take their rightful places?

How do we structure our individual lives in order to keep them uncluttered with things and activities?

How does meeting help us examine our personal lives for simplicity?

Do we choose recreational activities which foster mental, physical and spiritual health?

How are our lives affected by tobacco, alcohol and drug use?

What can we do to deal with problems resulting from their use?

What can we do to recognize and deal with unhealthy ways we treat ourselves?

How do we ensure that we act with fairness and integrity?

Are we sensitive to our own use of language which may be offensive or oppressive to others?

### **Selected Response**

We struggle to find appropriate ways to confront these overwhelming issues, beyond the usual letters and calls to seemingly unresponsive officials and institutions. Among our witness were the following thoughts:

“Staying informed on social issues,” as the Advice mentions, consequently requires more than just learning how our elected officials will vote on an issue and what our Meetings support or refute. Being informed also requires that we learn from communities who face greater oppression than ourselves, and who would bear far greater damaging consequences if officials continue to overlook or minimize the needs of those communities.

Another added, “ I try to focus on what God is wanting of me when I am out in the world and being called on to be brave. I know it is what is being asked because I am usually somewhat crippled with fear of speaking – stomach clenched, heart racing, and yet I cannot speak up. I feel relief when I do speak up. That dual feeling of crippling fear and must be brave is one of my personal physical touchstones for when I am being led to act. Being asked to do the hard thing instead of the easy thing. That feeling of being held firmly to a spot until I say what needs to be said, whether in the face of someone saying hateful things or engaging with someone who needs a friend. The feeling is the same.”



## 9. CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

### QUERIES

What conflicts do we perceive between the laws of the State and our religious convictions?

How do we resolve those conflicts in our lives?

In what ways do we assume responsibility for the government of our community, state, nation and world?

How do we share our convictions with others?

Do we express our opinions with courage, yet with love, mindful of the Divine Spirit within everyone?

How do we maintain our integrity when we find ourselves in a position of power?

How do we respond when we feel powerless?

Do we really respect and help those we seek to serve?

Are we careful to reach our decisions through prayer and strengthen our actions with worship?

Are we open to divine leadings?

### Selected Responses

Initial discussion centered around the inappropriate use of the phrase “Friends believe”. Since we do not have a dogma, but rather agree on the process of seeking together with respect for the views of others, there is no universal “belief”. We’ve been asked to comment on changes that should be made to our queries, and this is one that bears further discussion. This led to the importance of language and the responsibility to choose carefully how we state matters of faith, speaking always lovingly to others, even if differing in belief. In considering whether ... those whose beliefs or actions include violence would be welcome to worship within our community, there were doubts, though some felt that hateful attitudes in peaceful worship might be brought into the Light.

...

Our discussion of this query centered around several political issues that are currently prominent in the news. One person spoke of their mixed emotions about the recently passed more stringent requirements to the state abortion law. Another shared her personal experiences of working in a county hospital where she saw abuse of the legal right to an abortion and consequently felt strongly that the seemingly arbitrary taking of human life should not be condoned by the government. Another felt concern that there seemed to be a lack of understanding in Congress and the legislature of the economic conditions that effect personal decisions on many levels.

## **10. ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **QUERIES**

What are we doing about our disproportionate use of the world's resources?

Do we see unreasonable exploitation in our relationship with the rest of creation?

How can we nurture reverence and respect for life?

How can we become more fully aware of our interdependent relationship with the rest of creation?

To what extent are we aware of all life and the role we play?

What can we do in our own lives and communities to address environmental concerns?

### **Selected Response**

Our location in a rural area challenges us to seek means of responsible transportation, to limit miles driven, to be frugal in use of energy in all areas of our lives, and to encourage renewable energy sources when possible.

One of our members became concerned about environmental damage from cars and fossil fuels as a teenager and has chosen to not own or to drive automobiles, to use bicycles and public transportation where possible. He led us as a meeting to take up his concern about fossil fuel, which led to the approval of a minute on ethical transportation. A modified version of that minute was taken up and approved by the Yearly Meeting this year.

Others in our meeting choose to use alternative energy fuels, and lower-impact technologies, while others mindfully have chosen lower impact practices in farming and lifestyles, or have made radical changes to their diets and no longer eat red meat, choose to resource locally grown small-farm produce. We discuss how we are mindful of fair-trade and how we seek to appropriately distribute the weal to smaller economies.

## 11. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

### QUERIES

How are we beneficiaries of inequity and exploitation?

How are we victims of inequity and exploitation?

In what ways can we address these problems?

What can we do to improve the conditions in our correctional institutions and to address the mental and social problems of those confined there?

How can we improve our understanding of those who are driven to violence by subjection to racial, economic or political injustice?

In what ways do we oppose prejudice and injustice based on gender, sexual orientation, class, race, age, and physical, mental and emotional conditions?

How would individuals benefit from a society that values everyone? How would society benefit?

### Selected Responses

This Query brings to mind the lack of justice and human rights for prisoners in Nebraska that we heard about yesterday from a speaker from the Nebraska ACLU. We feel great concern about the inequalities of our society, and bullying of many groups of people who don't wield political or financial power. Fear makes us keep quiet in the face of inequity when we should speak.

In the workplace one of us noted that some people are enjoying their privileged positions because they have information or some other source of power, instead of feeling that they are serving the people. We feel that better communication across groups should lead to more justice, and that secrets are harmful at personal and political levels.

...

Economic practices are very often at the root of social injustices. While there are innumerable examples of inequities and discriminatory practices related to wages, access to housing, education, medical, and other services, we have failed to come to grips with some foundational economic injustices. We live and work on land that was outright stolen from Native Americans. Our buildings and infrastructure was built with the labor of enslaved African Americans and other people of color, with the resulting extensive benefits and profits going to white males. We will not be able to make progress regarding racial (including indigenous) injustice until we apologize for these wrongs, and find ways to redistribute the wealth and resources that were created as a result.

## **12. PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE**

### **QUERIES**

What are we doing to educate ourselves and others about the causes of conflict in our own lives, our families and our meetings?

Do we provide refuge and assistance, including advocacy, for spouses, children, or elderly persons who are victims of violence or neglect?

Do we recognize that we can be perpetrators as well as victims of violence?

How do we deal with this?

How can we support one another so that healing may take place?

What are we doing to understand the causes of war and violence and to work toward peaceful settlement of differences locally, nationally, and internationally?

How do we support institutions and organizations that promote peace?

Do we faithfully maintain our testimony against preparation for and participation in war?

### **Selected Responses**

It was noted that at least five of the queries address peace. Some members said that they were attracted to Friends Meeting because peace issues are a fundamental concern of Quakers and Quakers actively work for peace. The question of whether inner peace is needed to be a peacemaker came up. Many individuals throughout history have done valuable work for peace, but did not enjoy an inner peace. Support of social justice issues is important in peacemaking. Those who live in fear in our communities cannot let themselves be open to others. People need security in their lives before they can reach out to others. We may need to show our compassion with those living in fear over and over. It was pointed out that avoiding all conflict is not always possible in promoting peace. Working for peace and non-violence can sometimes be discouraging. One friend expressed her belief that working for peace and social justice requires steady, constant effort.

...

We are very concerned about the current administrations attempts to address US safety concerns through more military methods. Several of us try to contact our legislators by email or phone when important issues are being considered in Congress regarding military spending, Health Care, international relations, domestic safety issues, etc. We have found the alerts and information on issues by the FCNL especially helpful in these efforts.